

Lincoln

THAYER

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THE ASSASSINATION.

A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN WINDHAM, N. H.

ON

THE NATIONAL FAST,

JUNE 1, 1865.

BY

REV. LOREN THAYER,

PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

BOSTON.

PRESS OF T. R. MARVIN & SON, 42 CONGRESS STREET.

1865.

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FESSENDEN MILLS, ROCKINGHAM COUNTY,
NEW HAMPSHIRE, JUNE 5, 1865.

Rev. L. THAYER :—

Dear Sir,—It was moved, seconded, and adopted that a vote of thanks be tendered you for the interesting, comprehensive, and appropriate discourse, delivered by you on the morning of the first of June, the day set apart for a National Fast, in reference to the sad manner of the demise of our martyr President, and that a Committee be appointed to solicit a copy for publication.

In behalf of the Committee,

STEPHEN FESSENDEN.

Mr. FESSENDEN :—

Dear Sir,—Your favor of the 5th inst., is received, and in reply, I would state, that this sermon was hastily prepared, though not without warmth of feeling, (for no one can dwell upon the events considered without much feeling,) and is scarcely worth printing on its own account, but I am willing to have it preserved as a memento of the times and scenes through which we are passing, and as a memorial of our loved President. Therefore, I cheerfully submit it at your request.

Truly yours,

LOREN THAYER.

Windham, June 6, 1865.

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DISCOURSE.

DEUTERONOMY xxvii. 24.

CURSED BE HE THAT SMITETH HIS NEIGHBOR SECRETLY: AND ALL THE
PEOPLE SHALL SAY, AMEN.

THERE is no limit to the views that might be taken of the subject which is brought before us at this time; a subject which cannot be exhausted, by all that will be said upon it to-day, or even in generations to come. I shall confine myself to a few remarks, as they arise upon the occasion.

The character of Mr. Lincoln is a *study*, and not a well comprehended fact. This character may be better understood one hundred years hence, than it is in the present. He came up among the people, as a New Man, a "Novus Homo," the Latins would call him, who had to make his way up through established families, which held the first places in the state, and were disposed to press down any person who was rising from the lower ranks, lest they should be displaced, or eclipsed. He has no family name in the nation, but creates one by what he is and does. Although a member of Congress, he is not known to the country, till

his contest with Mr. Douglas, for the office of Senator from Illinois. Mr. Douglas's fame and rank in his party gave distinction and honor to his competitor. Being defeated in the election, he is a candidate for the sympathy and favor of his friends.

When the nomination of President is to be made, his section, the North-west, is entitled to the precedence and has the strongest claim to name one from among themselves for the office, and their most prominent candidate is Mr. Lincoln. Thus was he called providentially from obscurity and placed before the public, and as Providence is still working, He places him in the highest office by a large vote. Are we in fault for voting for Mr. Lincoln? It may be supposed we voted conscientiously, and as honestly as others, and yet he was elected, and his election was the *occasion* (not the *cause*) of the rebellion. Was the North wrong in voting for Mr. Lincoln, though it resulted in the rebellion? I must answer in the negative. We were, at least, as innocent in voting for him, as others were in voting for their candidate.

Providence has had a hand in this matter, and seeing the South ripe for rebellion, he took care that the occasion for it should not be wanting.

Mr. Lincoln gives no offense to the South in his speeches on his route to Washington. There appears some want of polish in them, and that finish which we gain in the schools, but no want of principle, or sense of justice,—no want of charity and kindness. No word from him have I

ever seen, which exhibited unsound morality, an evil temper, prejudice or passion: no railing or envy;—but on the other hand, probity and generosity. How generous would he have been to the rebels, probably, had he lived; more generous doubtless than many of his friends wished him to be.

Mr. Lincoln never thirsted for Mr. Davis's blood. We cannot say as much for Mr. Davis, and had the President lived, he might have let that traitor easily escape out of the country, and no one of his deluded followers would have lost his life; very likely, such would have been the result. Now, how different, We cannot tell the end of blood.

Mr. Lincoln's proclamations have been full of honesty, kindness and truth. What a contrast to the documents which came from Richmond! Specious, fair to appearance and false. It would now seem, that by the clear sight of reason, we might have predicted the doom of the rebellion, from the spirit and style of its proclamations; a lying spirit had been given to their agents from the first. The great thing, and perhaps the only thing of which the South could with any shadow of reason accuse Mr. Lincoln is, his proclamation of freedom to the slave. He proclaimed every slave free, and made them free as fast as he took them. This, we believe he did, as a war measure, and not because he sympathized with the slave in oppression. Though he did thus sympathize with the slave, that was not the reason why he proclaimed him free.

Did our President do wrong in this act? or had he authority to do it? There is no document or constitution which specified the duty; so there are many duties which are binding upon us, although they are not written out in so many words. There was no law or constitution, which commanded General Sherman to march through Georgia when he did, but it was the highest military duty. On the other hand, there is no law against the proclamation; no humanity against it. Slavery was both the cause of the rebellion and the power which sustained it; therefore it must be destroyed. There are some technicalities of legal right, which might be urged against the proclamation, such as this: The slave was individual property, and individual property is safe in war, and only public property is liable to the Government. This is true in a measure. Public property is liable first, and individual property next; for instance, if a man's orchard, or his house, stand in the way of the cannon, it must be destroyed. If it is necessary to public safety, that an individual's property be taken, it must be taken; though to destroy individual property wantonly in war is a crime, while Government stores and wealth are of course to be destroyed. If then it became necessary to the national existence, that the individual slave property be taken, it is lawful to take it. So our President reasoned, and thus he found permission to act out the feelings of his heart, which were in favor of Freedom. The master had no good right to his

slave, though he had a legal, or formal right. This may hereafter be looked upon as the great act of his administration, and yet it is the act which has made him odious to the rebels ; it is their excuse for unlawful warfare. They say our Government had the advantage in this respect, and they could not retaliate, and they therefore take the most cruel means to retaliate, starve prisoners and murder them, as at Fort Pillow, fire our cities, assassinate our Rulers, and send the pestilence among the army. But the Almighty has stopped them. He claims the right to send Pestilence, Fire and Death by such means, but he has not commissioned man to do it, and he has checked this mad endeavor.

See the madness of the South. Our radical speakers said some hard things against them. They reply, "we will fight," and they lift the axe and strike the blow which brings on this deadly war. We see where we can take lawful advantage of them, and free all the slaves that come within our power, which is approved by the Christian world, by all mankind, and we believe is approved in Heaven. We think God commends the act of emancipation, that it is in answer to the prayers of Christians and the slaves themselves. We believe the word of God counsels it, "Break every yoke." Because we take advantage of them, which we may do in accordance with humanity, they will have advantage of us right or wrong. They resort to works of darkness, secret plunges of the dagger,

arson, the secret touch of the torch at midnight throughout a wide city, that men, women and children, friend and foe, innocent and guilty, may be hurried together in the midst of flames and death. Do they expect, by so doing, that they will gain their cause, secure the approbation of posterity, of the good upon the earth, and of God? They have *lost* their cause. They will secure the approval only of the spirits in prison in the lower world, whose agents they appear to be. "Cursed be the man, who smiteth his neighbor secretly, and all the people shall say, Amen." The plot to secretly burn our cities, to starve the prisoners, to assassinate our rulers, to spread the yellow fever in our army, is only one and the same plot. It is the very worst measure that could be devised, and is of the same moral character throughout. The Black Hole in India has a dark odor to it throughout the world and the ages, because prisoners were driven into a small room, where they suffocated, all except a few near a window. Such is this infernal plot, one and the same, from beginning to end. Those who could starve prisoners, could murder the President. It is all in keeping: and we are told by Mr. H. S. Foote, a rebel senator, that it was decided in the rebel cabinet meeting, to adopt these measures, and apply the slow torture of starvation to our common soldiers, guiltless of the errors of Government. The proposition to burn cities was acted upon as a policy of Government. But the picture is too dark to dwell upon. I was one of

those who did not believe the South could do such things. I did not believe such anger dwelt in Southern minds. I feel grieved for America, that such inhumanity should be cherished by her sons, and for the race, that we have grown no better than we were in past cruel days.

Let us compare our good President with this course of procedure. How very opposite in everything. Words and deeds of kindness, "Charity to all and malice to none," was the spirit of his last inaugural message. The severest criticism I have heard pronounced by his political opponents upon that message, is, that it seemed to be preaching, or the conclusion of a sermon. Those were fitting words for a dying man to utter. If he had known he was soon to die, he could hardly have written a better Farewell Address. What did he say to the rebel commissioners for peace? "I cannot acknowledge your Government; but give up the war, throw down your arms, surrender, and I promise you great pardon; as far as I am concerned, I shall exercise the right to pardon liberally." What does Mr. Davis say? He has a secret agent all this while, at Washington, following this man with deadly weapons, who is not his foe, an enemy to no one, a friend to all. Such is the contrast while both are in power. They have fallen, they both have fallen; but how differently. One a martyr in a good cause, died for a noble principle of liberty and justice; and all good men, and all the nations of the earth, from the rising to the setting

sun, mourn his end. Never was such mourning made in this land for a mortal, never such honors, such triumphal marches for the dead. Never before were the nations moved to such instant and united grief as for the awful death of our beloved President. The other party flies in disgrace from his fictitious throne, as an outlaw, is captured in disguise, and imprisoned for his crimes ; a terrible scene of the great tragedy : and what a contrast, fitting contrast from fitting war and rebellion. We could not ask for a more triumphant end and vindication of our cause ; a proof that our principles of liberty are just and according to truth and eternal right. “ O let me die the death of the righteous, and my last end be like his.”

Here we would pause for a moment, and consider what the South has gained in all this course of oppression and evil doing. What has the South gained by slavery ? Wealth ; but how has it fled as mists of the morning ? Pride ; and pride has fitted them for destruction. Impatience and discontent with a good condition ; ignorance both of themselves and others, and much wickedness. This rebellion is the final fruit of slavery. Surely the North is better without slavery, than the South with it ; and I have no doubt, it will be a good thing for the South to get rid of it, even at this expensive rate ; and this war may prove to them and to us, a blessing in disguise. I hope so truly.

What has the South gained by rebellion ? They

have gained what evil doing will always gain in the end. A just punishment. "The wicked is snared in the work of his own hand." They are taken in the trap they hid for others. Had the people of the South pursued their own private business, and let each other alone, during the first four years of Mr. Lincoln's administration, they would not have suffered the loss of a jot of principle on his account, I think ; nor a farthing of property by his administration. What have they gained by this motion to sustain and enlarge slavery ? They have gained the loss of the institution itself, and hundreds of thousands of lives. The loss of their peaceful homes ; and many of them, the loss of all their earthly substance.

What have they gained by starving our men, while their prisoners ? Infamy, as long as the world shall stand, and also a wicked heart and evil mind beyond measure ; but for themselves, not one iota of advantage have they gained. It has done our northern families great harm, but themselves no good ; it may bring many of the guilty instruments to the gallows, and disturb the rest of many in their grave.

What advantage have they gained by firing our cities ? What care has Providence taken of our cities ! Their fires would not burn—almost a miracle. Beall has been executed, and others are imprisoned ; they have gained nothing.

What have they gained by the murder of our President ? Only stripes upon their own back.

The plot was successful it is true, but too successful for them. He died in his glory; in the very summit of his fame; for his own peace, his own honor and good, doubtless, he died timely, though not for his family. The Government has not been injured in the least; it has been consolidated upon a firmer basis, and gained many a friendly opinion abroad. But for the perpetrators, what have they gained, and the rebellion? "Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward." The reward of evil doing. They have killed him, who would have had mercy on them, and now they may die without mercy. They have palsied the hand which would have signed their pardon, and now, who will plead their cause? It is difficult to tell, whether the deed were more foolish or wicked. Folly and crime were united in the highest degree in the act. It has not injured the North, as much as it has the South. It has grieved the North. It was not in the power of man, or the evil world to bring out such weeping, as well as every demonstration of sorrow, as by this one act; but the South is the injured party.

They thought to do us an injury, but how mistaken; they only hurt themselves. What have they gained? Better, what have they lost by the act?

The whole country and the world may have gained by the act. The utter wickedness of the rebellion could not be known, and if known, could not be proved out, so that none could deny it, without Mr. Lincoln's assassination and this inhuman plot. Now though they gain nothing to them-

selves, and harm us little, yet they exhibit the heart of this rebellion, they set forth its character so that good men will withdraw from them their sympathy, and quietly give them over to their fate. Such an exhibition of useless wickedness, men have seldom seen. These crimes take away the romance and the honor, that otherwise might have encircled the downfall of the Confederacy.

Next, I will mention some particular providences which have shown that God has been on our side, or, at least, such as have been essential to our success, as without such providential interposition we must have failed.

I can name only a few of the many ; time would fail to enumerate the whole or half the catalogue ; such as the arrival of the first Monitor at the exact time when the Merrimack was making havoc with our fleet, and we had not another ship in the whole Navy which could cope with so formidable an adversary ; innumerable have appeared such providences. I name but few, and those of a different class.

One is the fact, that the President was from the North-west, which served not only to bind the North-west to the Union, but awakened an enthusiasm for the conflict, which no Eastern man could have aroused. The North-west has excelled us, not in loyalty, but in enthusiasm for the war, and given victory to Grant and to Sherman, in the South-west. There our victories began ; at Fort Henry, Donnelson, Corinth, Chattanooga, and

Atlanta. Since then the power of rebellion has rapidly waned. Great efforts have been made to detach the North-west from the Union, which might have been successful with an Eastern and unpopular President.

The next providential interposition in our behalf is, that God gave us a man of so good heart and life; always strictly and rigidly moral, and besides this, evincing religious principle and piety. There is evidence, I think, that he experienced religion.

But when God wishes to thwart the progress and power of a nation, one method of doing it is, to give that nation rulers of bad character, which appears to have been done for the Confederacy. Thanks to God, who gave us a virtuous President! He has been a mighty bulwark to this nation. God knew the heart of President Lincoln and gave him to be the head of the nation, in our hour of greatest peril. To me it is an impressive providential favor.

Another striking providence is, our defeat at Bull Run. It was not intended to be a permanent defeat, but only temporary. Harper's Ferry might have been first surprised and taken, and the rebels overthrown and discouraged at Bull Run, and the rebellion crushed. Then slavery would have been untouched, and our state restored as it was; but the purposes of Providence were otherwise and deeper. That defeat has been seen to be providentially in favor of the African. God would continue the war,

till slavery is destroyed, and the wickedness of the rebels is revealed.

The last providential interposition I allude to, is, the silence of the Democratic party, and to a large extent, their acquiescence in the measures of Government. Without this co-operation, and in face of violent Democratic opposition we could not have succeeded. The South counted upon this division at the North, which has not been witnessed. The opponents of Government politically have disliked many measures, but have not felt bound and impelled to resort to strong or violent opposition. Their acquiescence and to a large extent, assistance, have enabled the Government to go on unimpeded. They have gone to the war, they have submitted to taxation, and have thus done the service of loyal citizens, which in effect has presented the South a united North. I believe they loved their country, and would not move to resist except from the highest sense of duty.

By these providential favors, and the success which God has given us, we see the war ended, slavery abandoned, and the country returning to industrious peace.

Just upon the eve of this brighter day, our illustrious President fell by the hand of the secret assassin. That morning he had listened to the story of Lee's capture, with the surrender of the great rebel army, related by his son Robert, at the breakfast table; no doubt, he looked upon the struggle as virtually over, and he and the Govern-

ment were safe. This may have been the first feeling of safety, which came over him, since he left his quiet home in Springfield. The hour of felt security is often the hour nearest to danger.

“ We should suspect some danger nigh,
When we possess delight.”

I might speak of the future of the United States in Peace, but we could predict with more certainty if we knew the people would be virtuous.

In conclusion,—We are passing through a school of trials, such as seldom have visited a nation, and while we have felt the rod, we have received protection from the Hand that held it. We are preserved, while the Confederacy is overthrown; and what is even greater, we have been preserved from the wickedness into which our enemies have fallen. How much better to fall as Mr. Lincoln has, than as Mr. Davis! How much better to be murdered than to be the murderer! But our Government has not fallen; nor has it committed the crimes of the Confederacy. The starving of our men, as prisoners, is as bad morally, as assassination. General Sherman marched through Georgia and found her store-houses full of grain, and yet our sons and brothers were dying for want of bread withheld, in that land of plenty. There is an awful chapter of rebellion yet unrevealed, and it is coming out to light continually. Their treatment of Union men may be compared, to our advantage, with our treatment of secession sympathizers among us. They

have been cruel and savage to Union men ; we imprisoned the open and offensive, but have done them no harm by violence, till the war is over, and some have unwisely rejoiced over the death of the President.

We hear of the arrest of Gen. Lee, Governors Vance, Brown, and others ; they may be arrested as witnesses against Davis, or to open the secrets of secession, as much as on their own account. We have the archives of rebellion, and the whole will finally be known and read of all.

In the mean time, we have important duties to perform ; to pray for the President ; the judges, who are to mete out punishment, and all our rulers, that wisdom may be given them, so to temper mercy with justice, that the highest good may be secured, and God feared and honored.

Arduous duties remain to be done, and the highest goodness and wisdom to be executed, and the people to be reformed, by this heavy chastisement of the Almighty. When this work shall be well concluded, we may rejoice in the result, but till then, let us walk in fear and trembling.

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